

Ocean Day 2003

Good morning. Thank you for being here today. I am pleased to participate in Ocean Day 2003 to help keep our ocean clean. I'm especially happy to have the opportunity to talk with you about why it's so important to keep our ocean clean and to keep the marine life safe.

Sometimes people think, well – it's not my job, or, what can I do. **When it comes to trash what you do can make the difference.** Now, you might be asking why so many adults care so much. Why did your teachers take you out of school and bring you to the beach to pick up trash. So I'd like to try to tell you a little bit about why it's so important.

Storm water - the water that flows down our streets and gutters into our storm channels ends up in the ocean. No matter where you live in LA County, even if you live in the San Fernando Valley or East LA – the storm water comes to the ocean. Trash hitch hikes on that water and toxic chemicals hitch hike on that water and end up polluting our ocean. Sometimes there are so many things in the water that don't belong there that we have to close our beaches because too many people would get sick if they went swimming in the water.

First of all, how much trash are we talking about. After all if we throw one piece of trash out the car window how can that make a difference. So, let me tell you how much trash. Usually, we measure trash in tons. Today I'm going to measure trash in tons and in elephants because we don't all know how much a ton is, but we do all know how big an elephant is. Here we go: so far this year 41 tons of trash or an amount equal to 51 elephants have been removed from Compton Creek, 261 tons or 348 elephants from the LA River and 492 tons or 656 elephants from Coyote Creek. In 1999, 506 tons of trash or 674 elephants were collected on the beaches in Long Beach. So each individual piece of trash matters. Each individual piece of trash got there because someone threw something on the sidewalk or out a car window or into the street or someplace else beside the trash can.

Now we all know that smoking is bad for your health and that people who smoke have a high risk of getting cancer and other diseases. So I hope that the way we stop the trash of cigarette butts is by getting everyone to stop smoking. Until that day comes anyone who smokes has to learn to put their cigarette butts into trash cans. Because right now people dump approximately 149 thousand cigarette butts a day onto the streets in LA County. How much is 149,000 cigarette butts. Let's try measuring in football fields. 149 thousand cigarette butts, lined up end to end, would be equal in length to 41 football fields.

The most harmful trash is plastic. The reason is pretty simple. Eventually, most kinds of trash will biodegrade. That means that, over time, it will stop looking like a paper bag or whatever it was and break down into its parts and be reabsorbed by nature. But not plastic. Plastics photodegrade. That means that, with sunlight, they eventually break up into smaller and smaller particles but they will never, ever go away.

Now we all know that trash on the beach and in the ocean is ugly. But let's talk a little about why the trash is so bad for us. First, it carries toxic – that is harmful- chemicals and pathogens – germs. The toxic chemicals and pathogens get into the water and when we go swimming, can make us sick. They can make the fish and the marine animals sick also and then, when we eat fish or other marine animals we could be eating something that could make us sick. That's all trash.

Plastic trash is especially bad because when the birds and marine animals eat it they can't digest it. It fills up their stomachs and they die because they can't get any real food because their stomachs are full of plastics. Even the ones that don't eat the plastics can ingest the filaments that are in the water when the plastic photodegrades and that can make their bodies not work right and it can interfere with their reproducing.

The bad part about this is that it can be frightening and we can feel unhappy because we know the plastics we're allowing to go into the ocean can end up killing animals like sea turtles and birds like wild condors. The good part is that we can do something to solve the problem of trash.

Not only can we do something to solve this problem, we are. You are - by being here today to help clean the beach and to learn about what else you can do from all the speakers. I'm here today from the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board. Coastal Commissioners, City Councilmembers, City Attorneys, Environmental leaders and many other adults are working hard to solve this problem. And working together, I'm confident that we will be successful.

I want to close by thanking each one of you for being here today, for listening and for the clean-up you're about to do. I want to thank your teachers for knowing that it is important to your future to learn about keeping our ocean healthy. I want to thank the City of Los Angeles Stormwater Program, The Malibu Foundation for Environmental Education and the California Coastal Commission for sponsoring this inspiring event. And I want to thank Jon Bishop and Ginachi Amah, staff at the Regional Board who helped me to figure out how much trash and how many elephants and football fields. As always, we all need to stop and be thankful for our magnificent ocean. Thank you all.